US Annual Report on International Religious Freedom

327. SHRI AMAR SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the US State Department's Annual Report on Internation Religious Freedom for 1999 which sharply criticised the BJP, RSS and other organisations for their assitude towards religious conversion;

(b) if so, the details thereof and whether any action was taken against the organisations referred to in the report; and

(c) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefore?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) In response to a US domestic legislation, i.e., the International Religious Freedom Act passed by the US Congress in 1998, the US Department of State released the first Annual Report on International Religious Freedom. The report deals with all countries of the world. In the section on India, the report *inter-alia,* describes some incidents of alleged attacks on Christian institutions and persons. The Report also highlights the tradition of religious tolerance and the secular character of the State in India.

(c) Government regards this report as an internal document of the US Government. Government rejects any intrusive exercise into how we conduct our affairs. The Indian Constitution guarantees absolute religious freedom to the citizens of the country, reflecting the well-known social traditions of tolerance and respect for all religions.

Indo-US talks

328. SHRI SITARAM KESARI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of the talks held with the Government of United States in the recent past on matters concerning the two Governments; and

(b) the decisions taken, if any?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) Government initiated a dialogue on security and non-proliferation with the United States Government in July 1998. These talks have been led on the Indian side by the External Affairs Minister, Shri Jaswant Singh. The talk are being conducted on the basis of the comprehensive proposals that India has put forward on disarmament and non-proliferation matters, our unilateral moratorium on explosive nuclear tests, willingness to discuss converting this moratorium into a *de jure* obligation, our offer to enter into constructive negotiations on the FMCT and reaffirming our policies on stringent control on export of sensitive technologies.

The last meeting in this on-going dialogue was held in London on 16th and 17th November. The dialogue is continuing. In the course of this dialogue, the two sides also discuss major regional and international developments.